THE PRATER.

By NICHOLAS BABBLE, Esq;

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Let them censure, what care I,
The herd of Critics I defy.

PRIOR.

From my own apartment in *Henrietta-street, Covent-Garden.*

I AM an oldish man, sixty odd; but have all my senses perfect, and enjoy a large share of health; for which substantial and inestimable blessings, I pour out my sincerest thanks to the all-good bestower of them, every night when I repose upon my pillow, and every morning as soon as my eye-lids are unclosed: I was always of

an inquiſitive, communicative diſpoſition, and have been ſo long celebrated by my club at *Rawthmell*'s Coffee-houſe for a facetious and entertaining companion, that I begin to think myſelf thoroughly qualified to prate to a larger circle. My friends have at laſt flatter'd me into a belief that I have as much right to attract the attention of the Town as the daily, weekly, and monthly chatterers of the age; and where is the Man who can lay his hand upon his heart, and ſay, "I am proof againſt flattery."

I have read a great many books, converſed with a great number of my fellow-creatures of both ſexes, and made a great many obſervations on the former and on the latter, which are treaſured up in a huge folio, not much ſmaller than a volume of Mr. *Samuel Johnſon*'s uſeful and amuſing Dictionary.

From this huge folio, (which I always chuckle over with the higheſt ſatisfaction, and moſt cordial delight, becauſe it is filled with the productions of my own dear prolific brain) I intend to ſelect every *Saturday* ſuch obſervations, as I think will be moſt likely to make the name of BABBLE mention'd in all polite companies with approbation, and echoed with applauſe. I ſhall alſo, in order to keep up the character I aſſume with propriety, deem it abſolutely neceſſary to take particular notice of every little intereſting anecdote, and humorous adventure I happen to meet with, in my walks through this Metropolis, or in my rides around it, and for this reaſon, that my courteous Readers may be induced to think the PRATER *a mighty agreeable ſort of a Man, and prodigiouſly entertaining.*

A blunt, but very honeſt neighbour of mine, (whom I always cloſet whenever I am going to undertake any affair

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affair of importance, becauſe I have always found his ſagacity equal to his ſincerity) told me ſome days ago, after I had informed him of my deſign to appear in print, he thought I might manage a *Paper* once a week with ſpirit, and pleaſe the Public in the character of an Author, provided I took care not to deal too much in *tittle-tattle*. He adviſed me at the ſame time to write in ſuch a manner as to give offence to no Party whatever. " Be particularly careful, Friend " *Nicholas*, ſaid he, to avoid all *perſonal* reflections. " You had far better be dull than abuſive; and be " called a ſtupid fellow, than a ſcurrilous one. If you " diſcover a diſpoſition to give pleaſure, and to gain " every body's good will, you will be received with " candor, but a ſnarler, take my word for it, can be " agreeable to nobody. Thoſe who are charmed with " the lively ſtrokes and pointed turns in a witty ſa- " tire, are not always charmed with the Satiriſt; for " the *Writer* is frequently admired, when the *Man* is " deteſted." Theſe ſalutary admonitions I ſhall follow with the utmoſt punctuality, for a loaded die cannot be more prized by a ſharping gameſter, nor a ſwift-footed Steed by a timorous Highwayman, than theſe admonitions are by ME.

Authors of all capacities, whether Verſe-men or Proſe-men, are, in my humble opinion, a public-ſpirited ſet of people, and ought not to be irreverently treated. Nay I think the Government ſhould diſtinguiſh them in an uncommon manner: for whether they commit harmonious numbers or wretched rhymes, tuneful periods or heavy paragraphs, ſenſe or nonſenſe, to the preſs, they contribute to the conſumption of that valuable commodity Paper, and are, therefore, the laudable encouragers of one of the moſt flouriſhing manufactures in the three kingdoms: a manufacture, which, for its extenſive utility, cannot be too highly

highly commended, too vigorouſly ſupported, nor too powerfully patronized. I have myſelf a great deal of this public-ſpiritedneſs in me, and ſhall therefore ſcribble away *totis viribus*, with all my might, for the good of my Country; or as Mr. *Aſhley* with great archneſs ſays, *pro bono publico*. I earneſtly wiſh that ſome of my prating acquaintance in a certain aſſembly, had the intereſt of the nation as much at heart as I have; for if they had, they would not ſpend ſo much of their time in babbling meerly for their own private advantage.

When this firſt paper of mine makes its appearance in the coffee-houſes, which may not improperly be called *Courts of Criticiſm*; all the word-catchers who live on ſyllables, will, I ſuppoſe, be nibling at it, grumbling over it, and endeavouring to ſhew the depth of their underſtanding, and the elegance of their taſte, by ſhaking their heads at the *Triteneſs of the Sentiments*, and turning up their noſes at the *Meanneſs of the Diction:* in ſhort, by detecting ſome glaring blemiſh, ſome ſhocking abſurdity in every paragraph. Theſe cavillers deſerve the ſevereſt epithets, becauſe they uſe all their efforts to extinguiſh the leaſt ſpark of merit in a performance; and faſten on all the imperfections in it, with a malicious joy. Critics of this ſtamp put me in mind of Captain *Bobadil* in the play, for *they* examine a poem or an eſſay, juſt as *he* examines *Maſter Stephens's Toledo*, only to find a defect in it. No indigent fortune-hunter can take more pains to win the affections of a well-portion'd maiden, or a well-jointured widow, than theſe *malevoli* take to undermine an author's reputation.—But I will not ruffle my temper about them, for fear I ſhould render myſelf unable to follow my plain-dealing friend's abovemention'd wholeſome advice.

To

To conclude this introductory diſcourſe to a larger work, I *ſtoop* to the *Clemency* of the public, and hope I ſhall be heard pa—tient—ly. I will not preſume to aſſure my readers (for I abhor vanity) that I ſhall always *ſhine*, but I promiſe them I will always try with unwearied diligence, to make myſelf *agreeable*. I am not extremely anxious about popular applauſe, yet I ſhould be horribly in the dumps to ſee my lucubrations condemned to line trunks, band-boxes, and patty-pans.

The greateſt geniuſſes have their drowſy, as well as their ſprightly intervals; their hours of dejection, as well as their hours of gaiety: and if I NICHOLAS BABBLE ſhould ſometimes *take a Nap*, (for old folks are apt to be ſleepy) let the good-natur'd reader remember, that *Iſaac Bickerſtaff* and *Neſtor Ironſide*, my ever-honoured predeceſſors, (whoſe footſteps I ſhall endeavor to follow, without treading on their heels) *nodded* before me.

N. B. My next paper will be a very brilliant one, and quite out of the common road.

Thou, *Novelty*, art *my* Goddeſs.

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